



Recent Russian Anthologies

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RECENT RUSSIAN ANTHOLOGIES.

MANY causes combine towards making the anthology a particularly welcome type of book to the Russian reader, especially to the Russian refugee. The Russian refugee has, as a rule, left the books he had in Russia; his buying capacity is small; so a book like an anthology, which will do the service of many books, is a godsend. Besides for many years the taste for poetry has been ripening and mellowing among the educated classes of Russia, and the anthology meets this need. Quite a quantity of anthologies have appeared within the last two or three years, for the most part outside Soviet Russia. The most ambitious of these anthologies is the *Russky Parnas* (Russian Parnassus) compiled by Alexander and David Eliasberg (Insel-Verlag, Leipzig, 1920), forming part of the series *Bibliotheca Mundi*. The book, like all the publications of the Insel-Verlag, is well brought out and has an elegant appearance. It is only to be regretted that the type is antiquated, and disagreeably reminiscent of the German editions of "forbidden" Russian books that used to appear in the Sixties and Seventies. The compilers are Russian Germans. The selections cover the whole of the field of Russian literary poetry from Lomonosov to 1917. The editors have an extensive first-hand knowledge of Russian poetry, and the poets to be represented have been chosen fairly well. No really important names are omitted, but when it comes to the *di minores* of the Russian Parnassus some objections suggest themselves. The poetic work of Karamzin and of Turgenev is not represented, nor is Radishchev, whose "Sapphics" are certainly one of the most charming of XVIIIth century lyrics. Gnedich, also, and Benediktov are missed, whereas Teplyakov could easily have been dispensed with. Among the moderns it is gratifying to see Annensky receiving ample notice, but surely Anna Akhmatova might have received more than a single page, and we regret the absence of Marina Tsvetayeva. The selections of individual poems are far less commendable. Some of them are well nigh grotesque: for instance, Ryleyev, the tragical and lofty poet of Dekabristism, is represented by a piece of buffoonery and an insipid historical ballad. The selections from Derzhavin do not include either "God" or "The Death of Meshchersky," which is like making an English anthology without "St. Cecilia's Feast." And in other cases the editors seem to have deliberately refrained from including the poets' best work, merely because it has been accepted as such (e.g., Polonsky, Fet, Maykov, Nekrasov, A. Tolstoy). The "discoveries" of the editors are generally far from felicitous. They would have done better to follow the beaten track and accept the *δὲς τε τρίς τε καλὰ*. Among the moderns, where the editor is more at large, the selections are still less felicitous:—for instance, several pages are devoted to selections from Bryusov's later books (1910–1918), a dreary desert of uninspired mechanical versification. On the whole, however, *The Russian Parnassus* has to be

welcomed as the only, if far from adequate, anthology covering the whole field of Russian literary poetry, and, with the aforesaid limitations, may be recommended to the reader.

Of the other anthologies, the greater part limit themselves to modern poetry, or pursue special ends. Such, for instance, is *Raduga* (the Rainbow) edited by Sasha Cherny (Berlin, 1921. "Slovo" Press), a book of verse for children. It includes poetry of different ages, and much of the poetry included is good, but much is also included that is indifferent or bad. The whole book is vitiated by its childishness, a thing intolerable to children when once past ten. Nearly all the pieces included are more or less sentimental and sloppy, and there is nothing of what one could call poetry for boys. Lermontov's *Borodino* would have been a rather obvious thing to have included, and Gumilev might have lent himself to excellent selections.

Of the anthologies devoted exclusively to modern poetry, the first in date is that of Melnikova Papushkova's *Antologia Russkoy Poezii XX. Veka* (Anthology of Russian Poetry of the XXth Century), Prague, 1920, in two exceedingly slovenly, unbound volumes. It is certainly a curiosity. The editor's prefaces to each of the two volumes are masterpieces of stupidity, ignorance and bad Russian. The selections are quite at random and nearly exclusively from the earlier work of the poets (before 1910). The Anthology is utterly worthless, except as a means of amusement to those perverse people who will enjoy the prefaces.

The little anthologies published by the *Mysl* Press of Berlin (in the series *Kniga Dlya Vsekh* (Everyman's Book), Nos. 1, 17 and 50-51) are frankly commercial. Still they are welcome as providing the reader with much excellent verse that as a rule is now inaccessible in any other form. The selections include Balmont, Bryusov, Blok, Sologub (No. 1), Z. Hippus, Lokhvitskaya, Goredtsky (No. 17), Annensky (an excellent selection), Voloshin, V. Ivanov, Gumilev, Anna Akhmatova (Nos. 50-51). As they are very cheap (*6d.* in England), they have had a considerable success.

A more ambitious and more interesting anthology is *Portrety Russkikh Poetov* (Portraits of Russian Poets) by Ilya Ehrenburg, himself a poet and prose-writer of no mean achievement (*Argonavty* Press. Berlin, 1922). It includes short notices of each of the poets and selections. Each poet is represented by five poems. The poets represented are Akhmatova, Baltrushitis, Balmont, Blok, Bryusov, Bely, Voloshin, Esenin, Ivanov, Mandelstamm, Mayakovsky, Pasternak, Sologub, and Tsvetayeva. We regret the omission of Gumilev, Kuzmin, Khodosevich and Klyuev. The notices are very subjective and "impressionist," but contain many interesting appreciations and, based as they are on personal acquaintance, much valuable information. The selections are also to a degree subjective, but Mr. Ehrenburg's taste is interesting in itself, and he certainly has in most cases given true "portraits," having succeeded in singling out

particularly characteristic pieces. We think he exaggerates the importance of Pasternak, whom he seems to think the most promising of the younger generation. But he is also the first anthologist to give due attention to the exquisitely fresh and spontaneous poetry of Marina Tsvetayeva.

A place apart is occupied by anthologies devoted to Russian poetry since 1917. Of these there are two published by the *Mysl* Press, Berlin (in the series *Kniga Dlya Vsekh*, Nos. 2-3 and 57-58). The first is a haphazard and quite fortuitous collection of what the publishers could lay hands on at the end of 1920. Much of it is worthless. But it has a certain importance as being the cheapest accessible book containing Blok's *The Twelve*. It also contains interesting specimens of Esenin and Ehrenburg. The second is far more valuable; it was edited by Ehrenburg, who brought from Moscow in the autumn of 1921 a treasure-house of recent poetry, much of it unpublished, nearly all difficult of access. The collection is not wholly representative. Petrograd and the Provinces are admittedly under-represented. But it contains many masterpieces and gives a striking picture of the extraordinary vitality, courage and energy which Russian poetry has shown in the most adverse circumstances. The jewel of the collection is Vyacheslav Ivanov's sublime sequence of twelve *Winter Sonnets*, one of the purest and highest manifestations of the Russian poetical genius in recent times. Another gem is Gumilev's *Stray Tramcar*, and the short epigrammatic piece of Akhmatova. Among the younger poets Anna Radlova, Maria Shkapskaya and Vasily Kazm are particularly interesting.

All these anthologies have been published outside Russia. In Soviet Russia, where such a quantity of first rate poetry is being all the time published, there is, it would seem, less demand for anthologies, and the few that appear have all special subjects. We have not as yet been able to procure Yury Verkhovsky's *Poety Pushkinoy pory* (Poets contemporary to Pushkin). The name of the editor would seem to guarantee the excellency of the book.

A charming little volume is *Tsarskoe Selo v Russkoy Poezii* (Tsarskoe Selo in Russian Poetry) by E. Gollerbach (*Parthenon* Press, Petrograd, 1922). It is remarkable how much first-rate poetry has been inspired by that little town. Among the selections are some of the masterpieces of Pushkin and Tyutchev. Annensky, who spent all his life at Tsarskoe and was headmaster of the local gymnasium, naturally figures prominently. And it is agreeable to find adequately represented Count V. Komarovsky, whose best years were also spent at Tsarskoe, and whose peculiar and very personal charm has not up to the present received universal recognition.

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